



Example of quality type storefronts and awnings



Illustration of cafe opening onto the sidewalk



Example of illustrative cafe facades



Example of varied retail storefronts above and grouped news boxes located away from corner below

RETAIL SIGNS and AWNINGS

Commercial Signs

Throughout the District, as everywhere in the city, shop signs vary from elegant to vulgar, from high quality to shoddy. Because they are controlled by individual tenants with investments to consider, retail signs are difficult to regulate even on a voluntary basis. Nonetheless, standards of quality are needed, and are worth pursuing in the spirit of helpful advocacy.

Many private signs distract driver attention or obstruct visibility of public sign systems. Serious offenders of the visual environment include: oversized temporary "SALE" and "CLOSEOUT" signs on and above shopfronts; lighted hanging signs that project more than three feet; slipshod quality, and indiscriminate lettering; and makeshift paper signs.

Recommendations:

- Develop a Handbook of Design and Graphic Standards or, establish an EQD (environmental quality district) to illustrate an attitude toward quality retail signs (materials, letter sizes and forms, placement, illumination) while leaving room for diversity and imagination in shop signs, and use it to influence and guide new retail installations as they occur. Standards will not, per se, achieve regulation or eliminate negative examples. But, over time, the existence of clear guidelines will cause standards to change, producing evolutionary improvement.
- Publish and disseminate the Handbook to raise merchants', landlords' and sign makers' awareness and to motivate for voluntary improvements. Use it as the basis of a campaign for future sign ordinance, with incentives for retrofit.

Awnings and Extended Signs

Many awnings and hanging signs project over the public sidewalk. Awnings provide shade and weather protection, but are often poorly designed, oversized, and in shabby condition. Canopy posts frequently obstruct a walkway.

Many of the world's finest shopping streets limit or disallow projecting signs (i.e. sections of Fifth and Madison Avenue), or set firm standards of refinement that guarantee a contribution to the street's visual character and tradition.

Recommendations:

- As part of a Graphic Handbook or EQD, develop standards of size, placement, style, and materials for extended signs related to commerce on major thoroughfares. Projections should be limited to approximately four feet.
- Pole-support canopies are appropriate for hotels, apartment houses, lobby entrances, and restaurants, wherever people congregate and wait for cars and taxis. Retail canopies should be limited to 3-4 foot extensions, without poles.
- Shops and food establishments should be encouraged to create visible identity on the front and sides of small awnings of good quality, to replace extended signs.

Storefronts / Outdoor Vending

Interesting storefronts play an important role in the re-imaging of the business district. High and varied storefronts (12 to 15 feet) with proper illumination will entice pedestrian traffic and promote activity at night. In addition, cafes that open onto the sidewalk with outdoor seating provide places to rest and be participants within of the district's street environment.

Automatic vendors or news boxes, placed independently by a number of different publications, have become increasingly common in the District. Unchecked, the news box trend may lead to a free-for-all of promotional literature that could permeate throughout the District, cluttering sidewalks and crossings.

Recommendations:

- As part of a Graphic or EQD, develop recommendations for size, materials, entrance locations, and signage locations without inhibiting creative and exciting designs.
- Develop a new compact (72 s.f.) news kiosk of suitable character for selected, well-dispersed locations away from corners or seek alternate news stands within buildings. Develop criteria that limit merchandise to published periodicals and small convenience items.
- In areas remote from newsstand services, seek cooperation in clustering news boxes in designated locations only, away from curb, utilizing blank building walls as a back drop, with standard boxes for all publications.
- Identify appropriate spaces/locations for news boxes.